

# Public Interest Unlimited

CHRISTINE STUTZ

## School of Law co-hosts conference for potential public-interest advocates

The School of Law co-sponsored, for the second consecutive year, the National Association for Public Interest Law (NAPIL) Career Fair & Conference. Its partnership with NAPIL in hosting the weekend event is evidence that “The University of Maryland School of Law has truly established itself as a national leader in promoting public-interest law,” says M. Teresa Schmiedeler, director of career development at the law school. The

conference and career fair, Oct. 29 to 31, allowed law students seeking careers in public-interest law the opportunity to network with peers, interview with potential employers, and learn about various specialties within the field. The highlight of the conference was Friday night’s awards dinner, at which First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and several

law students who have done outstanding work in public-interest law were honored.

The career fair drew more than 200 national employers, including government agencies, public-interest law firms and not-for-profit organizations, Schmiedeler says.

NAPIL, based in Washington, D.C., is the country’s largest organization dedicated to training and supporting public service-minded law students. Mindy DeAtley, a second-year Maryland law student who is president of the Maryland Public Interest Law Project (MPILP), the student-run NAPIL affiliate, says the career fair and conference was effective in “clinching the deal” for students who are on the fence about public-interest law. “This weekend event provided an excellent opportunity for Maryland law students to get an idea of what public-interest law is all about and to get an idea of the many public-interest practice areas,” she says.

More than 1,500 law students from around the country attended the career fair and conference, held at the Renaissance Hotel in Washington, D.C. The event included workshops covering public-interest job search strategies, non-traditional legal careers, child advocacy, labor law, perspectives from attorneys of color and disability law. Ruben Chavez, a third-year student at the law school, spent last summer as a NAPIL (VISTA) Summer Legal Corps Fellow working for Rural California Housing Corp. in Sacramento. He spoke about his summer fellowship on a panel discussing public service. As a summer fellow, Chavez focused on community development accounts and micro-loans for low-income clients.

At the awards dinner, Clinton spoke about the importance of supporting law students who choose to do public-service work, and how law schools can encourage those students. As the student honorees spoke of their experiences, DeAtley says she could see her fellow Maryland law students warming to the idea of a career in public-interest law. “It’s amazing to hear their stories and realize the difference one can make as a public-interest advocate.”

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*M. Teresa Schmiedeler contributed to this article.*



PHOTOS BY ANN GRILLO



(Far left) First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton was honored for her work in public-interest law. (Above) Deirdre Stephens, NAPIL’s director of student organizing (Left) David Stern, NAPIL’s executive director